

Dr. Mohinder P. Sambhi

Musical Taj Mahal in Memory of Doctor's Wife

By VEVANDH



If music be the food of love, Dr. Mohinder P. Sambhi still plays on. That explains why the department of ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles, is now recruiting a full-time permanent professor to fill the Mohindar (Minno) Brar Sambhi Chair of Indian Music, supported by a \$1 million endowment.

Last October, the Ludhiana-born doctor, a hypertension specialist who spent his career teaching at Indian and American universities, made the endowment in the memory of his wife of 51 years, known as Minno, to celebrate her love of music and his love for her.

The gift is like a musical Taj Mahal, designed to give inspiration and enjoyment for years to come.

UCLA, where Sambhi was a professor from 1971 to 1994, received half of the endowment—\$500,000—in June. The rest would be paid by his estate. Meanwhile, he is to provide \$25,000 per year in operating expenses with the interest from the remaining half million, and the university hopes to fill the position by early next year.

The Sambhi Chair is meant to support the teaching and research activities of a distinguished faculty member by underwriting graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. "It is gratifying that I can honor my wife with a gift that will ensure that the study of Indian musical culture will continue to be supported at UCLA," says Sambhi. "Minno was an ardent music lover and a child psychiatrist who believed in the healing powers of music, especially while treating children."

For Sambhi, love may have bloomed on Indian soil but it really matured into marital bliss in the United States. While teaching at Lady Hardinge Medical College in New Delhi in 1951, he met his student-turned-soul mate, Minno. They married in 1953, much against his parents' wishes, and sailed off to America, announcing the wedding from New York.

"I accepted a position as an intern in Cleveland, Ohio. The money was not enough for the two of us to live on," Sambhi remembers. However, he was sure he wanted an academic career in medicine, despite the lower pay. "For the next four

years, I worked as a postgraduate research fellow. I selected hypertension as my specialty. My wife trained as a child psychiatrist and always made more money in training than I did and she supported my research career," he says.

In 1958, after finishing his residency training, Sambhi says he was offered \$100,000 a year to go into private practice with his mentor. But Minno told him, "I know you. You may never make full professor, but you will never be happy unless you have tried. I would rather have a contented husband than a rich one."

Sambhi did achieve a full professorship, and the couple also did alright financially, astutely investing in real estate and selling the succession of homes they lived in to amass the funds the doctor is now giving away.

He first joined the University of Southern California Medical School faculty where he worked from 1961 to 1971, then moved across town to rival UCLA, where eventually, he headed his own department of hypertension and became an emeritus professor.

"We never made a lot of

money from our salaries," he says, "only enough to live on quite well, including hobbies such as travel and wine. My students would look forward to their teaching rotation with me in the hope that they would be treated to some great wines, and they were," states Sambhi. "I auctioned off most of my cellar after Minno was gone."

Though Minno died in 2004, the bond they shared endures through several philanthropic missions undertaken by Sambhi. For example, in January, he pledged \$135,000 to set up the Minno Sambhi free blood transfusion program in Chandigarh for children suffering from thalassemia. His estate will pay the money to the PGI Blood Bank to fund the program in perpetuity.

"My greatest regret," Sambhi says, "is not to have asked Minno earlier if anything was lacking in her life. I did ask her and she said it would have been nice to have a couple of kids. When we discussed it, it was already too late." □

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